# Substance misuse policy - Fostering

**Introduction**

From time to time a foster carer may encounter a young person who, like many of their peers, will experiment with potentially harmful substances. Other young people may have, or may develop, a substance misuse problem which will need to be addressed. Some children and young people may have a background of substance misuse by others in their family. This policy is intended to provide a framework for foster carers and those who support them, to deal with these issues.

**Training**

* All foster carers will have access to substance misuse training aimed at: giving them a basic understanding and awareness of drug and alcohol issues and the misuse of drugs (prescribed and non-prescribed), solvents and alcohol, and helping them to view drug issues in a helpful context, thereby increasing confidence in responding to young people’s drug and/or alcohol use and misuse with insight and understanding.

Engagement in substance misuse training is seen as a priority for Adolescent Foster Carers, and will be strongly encouraged in supervision.

* ‘Substance Misuse Foster Carers’ will undertake training aimed at developing their knowledge, skills and confidence in identifying young people’s substance misuse related needs and in accessing appropriate substance misuse services (see Appendix 1 for the Foster Carers Training pathway and intended learning outcomes).

**Foster carers**

Foster carers provide positive role-models to the children and young people in their care.

* Foster carers are expected to model acceptable behaviour regarding drugs and alcohol at all times – recognising their responsibilities to the children in their care, and taking into account the specific needs of each child arising from the child’s own and/or their family’s experiences of substance use and misuse.
* In particular carers should not use alcohol at any time to the extent that their ability to carry out their caring duties is impaired. This includes their ability to respond to unexpected or emergency incidents.
* Foster carers should ensure that their own legitimate alcohol and prescription medicines are stored in a way which is appropriate to the circumstances of the child(ren) that they are caring for. There can be no hard-and-fast rule for this, but carers should guard against both the natural curiosity of children and developing adolescents, and any specific risks identified in an individual child’s placement plan.
* Foster carers are encouraged to have age and situation appropriate discussions about drugs and alcohol with young people in their care. It is important that such discussions are based on the learning from the training at (1) above.

**Drug and alcohol use/misuse by children and young people**

Please note the following statement:

**Norfolk County Council Children’s Services does not condone the use of drugs or alcohol outside the legal framework.**

* Foster carers can expect that any known relevant information concerning substance misuse issues or risks presented by the young person and/or their family will be shared with them as part of the child’s placement plan.
* Where a child or young person has an identified need relating to substance misuse issues or risks, this will be dealt with and included in the child’s care or pathway plan. All parties to the plan, including the foster carer, will be expected to behave accordingly. The Matthew Project Under18[[1]](#footnote-1) will be involved in developing and/or reviewing the care or pathway plan as appropriate
* Where a foster carer identifies new or previously unrecognised substance misuse issues for the young person they are caring for, this should be discussed with the child’s social worker and notified to the carer’s supervisor at the earliest opportunity. The carers should record any relevant information in their records for the child.

**Substance misuse incidents**

It is not possible to anticipate and provide guidance for every eventuality. Where situations arise that require the use of discretion, foster carers should apply the learning from the training at (1) above and take into account the young person’s age and situation when responding.

The following guidance should be used as a framework to guide a carer’s response:

* 1- off situations where it is known or suspected that a young person has used drugs or alcohol socially in a way which has adversely affected their behaviour or well-being:
  + The young person should be kept safe and well until the effect of the substance has worn off.
  + When the young person has recovered, the carer should discuss with the young person the impact of the substance misuse on them and those around them – including the carer and their family.
  + The carer should inform the child’s social worker and their supervisor and agree future actions (if any).
  + The Matthew Project Under18 can be contacted for advice, information and support on 0800 970 4866.
* Repeated incidents of above
  + Carers should respond to the incident(s) as above
  + In discussion with the young person’s social worker and the carer’s supervisor, consideration should be given to whether a pattern of misuse is developing / has developed.
  + Where appropriate support from The Matthew Project Under18 should be engaged.
* Situation(s) where a young person has taken alcohol or drugs to a level that they are incoherent and/or incapacitated, and their ability to safeguard themselves is significantly reduced:
  + The carer should use their discretion to take direct action and seek medical help.
  + The Matthew Project Under18 can be contacted for advice, information and support on 0800 970 4866.

**Discovery/possession of substances (including alcohol) or drug paraphernalia**

Where a young person has previously known and identified substance misuse issues, in which there is a known risk that substances or paraphernalia may be found or identified by the carer, this should be addressed in the young person’s placement plan and any actions taken by the carer or others involved in the support of the young person should be in line with that plan.

If a carer becomes aware that a young person is in possession of a substance or drug paraphernalia *in circumstance not covered by placement plan:*

* Unless the carer feels that doing so may place themselves or the young person at risk, the carer should challenge the young person as to the nature and use of the substance or paraphernalia.
* The carer should ask the young person to hand over the substance or paraphernalia, or where the carer has discovered these without the young person’s knowledge they should be confiscated.
* The carer should not attempt to take it away if the young person objects, but should accept it if it is offered.
* Applying learning from the training at (1) above, the carer should make a judgement as to the appropriate immediate action:
  + contact the young person’s social worker and the carer’s supervisor at the next reasonable opportunity to discuss and agree a course of action.
  + Make immediate contact with the young person’s social worker and the carer’s supervisor to agree immediate actions.
  + In some circumstances it will be appropriate to involve the police. Wherever possible, the carer should discuss this with the social worker and/or the carer’s supervisor before taking such action. However, if the carer judges that the risk to the young person or others is significant and urgent the carer should inform the police and request attendance.
  + The Matthew Project Under18 can be contacted for advice, information and support on 0800 970 4866.

When as a result of following this policy and guidance a carer comes into possession of an illicit substance or drug paraphernalia, s/he should immediately call Norfolk Constabulary on 101 to arrange safe and appropriate disposal. Carers are reassured that this is a legitimate course of action under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971[[2]](#footnote-2). Carers are not encouraged to dispose of any substances themselves other than via this route.

**APPENDIX 1**

N-DAP substance misuse training pathway for foster carers

# **Background**

* 1. Substance misuse has the potential to impact negatively on children and young people’s chances of reaching their full potential. Children and young people who are looked after (or have been looked after) are particularly vulnerable to substance misuse.
  2. This training pathway has been developed to meet the substance misuse need of three populations of young people who may be placed in foster care:

**1.2.1 Population 1 Young people with no identified substance misuse need who are placed in foster care**

This population should have access to:

* Screening to assess the extent of their use of substances
* Information on the use of substances and their effects
* Support and/or encouragement to access appropriate substance misuse services where there are concerns about the level, frequency or impact of use of substances
* Appropriate referral where there are concerns about the level, frequency or impact of use of substances

(n.b. these may be provided by foster carers and/or professionals).

**1.2.2 Population 2 Young people with an identified substance misuse need who are placed with foster carers**

This population should have access to:

* Knowledgeable, confident and well-supported foster carers
* Targeted and/or specialist substance misuse interventions

**1.2.3 Population 3 Young people who have been assessed by The Matthew Project Under18 Service as needing residential substance misuse treatment to decrease their level of risk from substance misuse and/or to gain access to highly intensive substance misuse interventions; and for whom the available residential treatment services are not thought to be appropriate**

This population should have access to:

* Knowledgeable, confident and well-supported foster carers
* Specialist substance misuse interventions

1.3 This training pathway has been developed by representatives of N-DAP Young People’s Implementation Group and Norfolk Children’s Services.

1. **Pathway**

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| --- | --- |
| **Level** | 1 |
| **Course name** | Introduction to Drug and Alcohol Awareness |
| **Target audience** | All foster carers |
| **Target population** | 1 |
| **Training Provider** | The Matthew Project Under18 Service |
| **Duration** | 3 hours |
| **Aim** | To give a basic understanding and awareness of drug and alcohol issues and the misuse of drugs (prescribed and non-prescribed), solvents and alcohol. |
| **Learning Outcomes** | By the end of this course participants will be able to:   1. Describe types of drugs. 2. List drug and alcohol effects. 3. Recognise drug paraphernalia. 4. Recognise risk taking behaviour as a part of adolescent development. 5. Recognise different signs and symptoms of drug use. 6. Differentiate between different types of drug use. 7. Know how to seek advice and support from The Matthew Project U18 Service |

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| --- | --- |
| **Level** | 2 |
| **Course name** | Young People, Drugs and Alcohol What Should I Do? Part 1 |
| **Target audience** | All foster carers |
| **Target population** | 1 |
| **Training Provider** | Norfolk DAAT |
| **Duration** | 1 day |
| **Aim** | To help participants to view drug and alcohol issues in a helpful context, and thereby increase their confidence in responding to young people’s drug and or alcohol use and misuse with insight and understanding. |
| **Learning Outcomes** | By the end of the day participants will be able to:   * Recall basic definitions of commonly used terms. * Distinguish between drug & alcohol facts and myths. * Name types of drugs and list drug effects. * Differentiate between different patterns of drug & alcohol use. * List specific issues around young people and alcohol/drug use. * Summarise basic theories of addictions. * Explain how substances are classified. * Recall current drug and alcohol legislation. * Place drug use in context. |

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| --- | --- |
| **Level** | 3 |
| **Course name** | Substance Misuse Foster Carer training |
| **Target audience** | Foster carers aiming to become ‘Substance Misuse Foster Carers’ |
| **Target population** | 2 and 3 |
| **Training Provider** | Norfolk DAAT |
| **Duration** | 3 x ½ days |
| **Aim** | To develop participant’s knowledge, skills and confidence in identifying young people’s substance misuse related needs and in accessing appropriate substance misuse services. |
| **Learning Outcomes** | **Learning outcomes:**  By the end of the sessions participants will be able to:   * Recall groups of young people who are identified as vulnerable to substance misuse. * Name risk and protective factors associated with substance misuse by young people and explain the concept of resilience. * List key factors that help to build resilience. * Demonstrate the engagement skills necessary to identify a young person's substance misuse related needs * Identify the appropriate steps to take in a variety of screening scenarios. * Identify appropriate young people’s drug and alcohol information * Access appropriate substance misuse services. * Describe the appropriate action to take where a young person may be suffering, or may be at risk of suffering, significant harm. * List the five domains for young people’s specialist substance misuse care planning. * Explain the importance of involving practitioners, young people and their parents or carers in developing the care plan. * Recognise own part in engaging in joint care planning with the Matthew Project. |

1. Norfolk’s commissioned drug and alcohol service for young people [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The Act refers to person(s) who may legitimately possess a controlled drug, including those who satisfy the conditions of the statutory defence that they took possession of a known or suspected controlled drug either (1) in order to prevent another committing an offence and that as soon as possible they took all reasonable steps to destroy it or deliver it into the custody of a person lawfully entitled to take custody of it, or (2) in order to deliver it into the custody of such a person and that as soon as possible they took all reasonable steps to do so. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)